

# The Neighbourhood Improvement Plan

## Montreal and Toronto: Contrasts between a participatory and a centralized approach to urban policy making

Pierre Filion

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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Résumé de l'article

À la fin des années soixante et au début des années soixante-dix, le gouvernement fédéral du Canada a changé le cap de sa politique de rénovation urbaine. Ce changement a mené à l'adoption, en 1973, du Programme d'amélioration de quartier (PAQ). Ce programme se démarquait des programmes précédents par son respect du cadre bâti et l'importante place donnée aux résidents dans l'aménagement de leur quartier. Cet article a comme objet la différence dans la position prise par l'administration municipale de Montréal et de Toronto à l'égard du PAQ, et l'impact de cette différence sur l'usage que les deux villes ont fait du programme. Il apparaît que l'implantation du PAQ à Toronto s'est faite dans le respect de la nouvelle philosophie fédérale en matière de rénovation urbaine, alors que la Ville de Montréal s'est servie du PAQ afin de poursuivre une politique d'aménagement antérieure au renouveau fédéral. L'auteur voit dans ces deux types d'utilisations du PAQ, l'expression d'approches opposées à la politique urbaine au niveau local : l'approche « participante » et l'approche « centraliste ».

## ***The Neighbourhood Improvement Plan***

### ***Montreal and Toronto: Contrasts between a participatory and a centralized approach to urban policy making***

Pierre Fillion

#### ***Abstract***

***During the late 1960s and early 1970s the Canadian government effected a turnabout in its urban renewal policy, which culminated in the launching of the Neighbourhood Improvement Program in 1973. This program differed from prior forms of renewal by emphasizing the preservation of the built environment and citizen participation in neighbourhood planning. This article is concerned with examining the difference in the attitudes the city administrations of Montreal and Toronto took toward the federal program, and the impact of this difference on the results in the two cities. It appears that Toronto's mode of implementation was in the spirit of the federal policy revision while Montreal endeavoured to pursue traditional urban renewal objectives through its use of the program. These two approaches to the Neighbourhood Improvement Program are depicted respectively as expressions of a participatory and a centralized mode of policy making at the local level.***

#### ***Résumé***

***A la fin des années soixante et au début des années soixante-dix, le gouvernement fédéral du Canada a changé le cap de sa politique de rénovation urbaine. Ce changement a mené à l'adoption, en 1973, du Programme d'amélioration de quartier (PAQ). Ce programme se démarquait des programmes précédents par son respect du cadre bâti et l'importante place donnée aux résidents dans l'aménagement de leur quartier. Cet article a comme objet la différence dans la position prise par l'administration municipale de Montréal et de Toronto à l'égard du PAQ, et l'impact de cette différence sur l'usage que les deux villes ont fait du programme. Il appert que l'implantation du PAQ à Toronto s'est***

During the latter half of the 1960s, urban renewal projects in many Canadian cities became objects of bitter controversy. In 1973, after a period of reflection on the matter, the federal government adopted the Neighbourhood Improvement Plan (NIP) as an alternative to traditional forms of urban renewal. The program, the implementation of which took place between 1974 and 1983, marked a watershed in terms of urban renewal in Canada in that it favoured both a safeguarding of the built environment of inner-city neighbourhoods and the opening of the planning process to citizen participation. Prior to this program urban renewal in Canada had generally involved the complete clearing and reconstruction of sites as well as a top-heavy planning procedure.

This paper aims to identify and explain differences in the use of the NIP by Canada's two largest cities: Montreal and Toronto. Explanations of these differences will rise from a consideration of how these two cities were predisposed to the federal policy by their respective urban renewal experience. We shall see that to a large degree the evolution of renewal policy followed a similar course in Toronto and at the federal level. This coincidence will be attributed to protest movements, which brought traditional renewal projects to a halt, and to the active role played by council members supporting these movements. We shall see that, meanwhile, in Montreal local politics and social policy favoured the construction of public housing. That urge as well as the autocratic nature of the city administration were behind a determination to cling to more traditional forms of urban renewal.

This paper will contrast a centralized and a participatory form of policy making. In the former, seen in Montreal's approach to the NIP, the steering capacity is tightly held in the hands of top political figures and experts. In the latter, as seen in Toronto's response, the public assumes a central role in the definition

of policies. The analysis of the two approaches to this federal program will highlight conditions for the existence of the two modes of policy making. In addition, an account of the accomplishments effected through the NIP in Montreal and Toronto will show how these two types of processes shape results.

#### ***The Defusing of the Urban Renewal Bomb by the Federal Government***

Between 1948 and 1968 the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) expended \$125 million on 48 urban renewal projects. These projects, consisting for the most part of the replacement of the built environment of designated areas, involved the demolition of 13,000 housing units, which made room for 18,000 new dwellings, two-thirds of which fell within the public housing category. In the 1960s urban renewal became the source of increasingly bitter confrontations between residents clinging to their neighbourhoods and city administrations implementing federally financed renewal schemes. A call was made for a form of urban renewal that would be less disruptive for the inhabitants of affected neighbourhoods. Trefann Court in Toronto and Strathcona in Vancouver would become national symbols of residents' resistance to renewal.

In 1968 Paul Hellyer, the minister responsible for CMHC, responded to this protest by setting up the Housing Task Force, the chairmanship of which he himself assumed.<sup>1</sup> In its report the following year it identified two major areas of concern: public housing and urban renewal. With respect to public housing, it criticized the tendency to create, at great costs, ghettos for the poor which bred a profound dissatisfaction on the part of their residents. While not questioning the need for urban renewal, it expressed serious doubts about the worthiness of present practices and principles. It was particularly uneasy about the destruction of sound

***faite dans le respect de la nouvelle philosophie fédérale en matière de rénovation urbaine, alors que la Ville de Montréal s'est servie du PAQ afin de poursuivre une politique d'aménagement antérieure au renouveau fédéral. L'auteur voit dans ces deux types d'utilisations du PAQ, l'expression d'approches opposées à la politique urbaine au niveau local: l'approche "participante" et l'approche "centraliste."***

dwellings by renewal schemes and the little heed given to relocation needs. The task force's verdict was that urban renewal in Canada had reached a crossroads and was in need of an overall reassessment.<sup>2</sup>

Although its report was rejected by cabinet, several recommendations were adopted in piecemeal fashion such as Ottawa's decision to freeze federal support to urban renewal in November 1969. However, financing of projects that were at an advanced stage was to be maintained. The purpose of this freeze was to afford time for reflection in order to explore alternative approaches to the question. The task of devising an innovative urban renewal policy was entrusted to the newly established Policy Planning Division of CMHC. The time at hand was limited. Provinces and municipalities were pressing the federal government for a prompt resumption of its contribution toward urban renewal.

Two key objectives guided the work of CMHC policy planners in their efforts to reorient federal urban renewal inventories. The first was to eliminate the contentious aspects of previous programs. Secondly, they wanted to devise a program that would be consonant with the political reality of the time. In effect they were confronted with the problem of finding a form of urban renewal that would be simultaneously palatable to the residents of the affected neighbourhoods and to the provinces as well as to the Treasury Board, which was pressing for tighter controls on federal expenditure. These objectives were clearly reflected in their brain-child, the NIP, created by parliament in June 1973. The NIP assumed the form of a "cleansed" version of urban renewal, bereft of the adverse features of earlier programs. Indeed the NIP was framed so as to deter municipalities from going ahead with the destruction of sound housing and the construction of high density developments on renewal sites and from adopting a rigid top-heavy planning procedure. Meanwhile, in response to provincial grievances voiced

about the delivery of previous programs, CMHC was given a low profile in the planning and implementation of the NIP. Its role was restricted to the certification of applications, the monitoring of the program, and the provision of funds. Most responsibilities were vested in the municipalities, which were charged with the planning and implementation of individual NIP projects. Finally, to secure the consent of the Treasury Board, statutory limits were placed on the overall federal contribution to the program. Grants and loans were not to exceed \$300 million over the life of the program. In order to ensure that these limits were respected, the total amount to be allocated to the different NIP projects was specified early on in their respective planning process. Also, it was understood that the program's life span would be five years.

The NIP stipulated seven criteria that had to be met for an area to be eligible for the program:

1. Over 50 per cent of its land use had to be residential;
2. Over 25 per cent of its dwellings had to be in need of repair;
3. Its physical environment had to be deficient or deteriorated;
4. Its social or recreational facilities had to be deficient or deteriorated;
5. Its mean household income had to be below that of the municipality;
6. It had to be potentially stable, i.e. unlikely to be disrupted by new major projects and its housing stock had to be protected by the municipal enforcement of a maintenance and occupancy by-law;
7. At least \$100 of NIP money had to be spent per capita within it.<sup>3</sup>

The CMHC contribution varied according to the expenditure involved. A 50 per cent subsidy was paid for the acquisition and clearing of land if it was destined to serve as open space or to accommodate social and recreational activities. The acquisition and clearing of sites for medium and low density

housing, intended for low and moderate income households, also qualified for this subsidy, as did the elimination of either residential buildings that were beyond economic rehabilitation or land uses that were noxious and inconsistent with the residential character of the area. The two last items for which a 50 per cent subsidy was paid were the acquisition, improvement, and construction of social and recreational facilities and the relocation and compensation costs of displaced households. The improvement of municipal and public utility services and the acquisition of land for other than the above-mentioned purposes qualified for a 25 per cent grant.<sup>4</sup> The remainder of the expenditures to be shared equally by the province and the municipality when the CMHC contribution was 50 per cent, when it was 25 per cent, the province was responsible for two-thirds of the remainder and the municipality one-third.

The NIP was complemented by the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP), which provided loans for housing rehabilitation purposes. Low-income homeowners were eligible for a portion of the loan being forgiven. At first, RRAP loans were limited to properties located within NIP areas but, later on, this close association between NIP and RRAP was relaxed.<sup>5</sup>

The NIP became operational in 1974 and expired on 31 March 1978 when it was not renewed after its statutory five-year period of existence. Nevertheless, because of the late initiation of the program in many areas, NIP implementation proceeded until 1983 when the final claims to the CMHC were filed. Overall, the program involved 479 areas in 317 municipalities.<sup>6</sup> We shall now see how the NIP was received within the two largest Canadian cities.

### ***The NIP in Toronto; A Tailor-made Program Delivered at the Right Time***

#### *Urban Renewal in Toronto*

From WW II until 1970 the evolution of urban renewal can be divided into three phases. The first phase, which spans the 15 years between 1947 and 1962, is characterized by large-scale public housing projects requiring the sweeping away and reconstruction of selected areas. The CMHC underwrote 50 per cent of the cost of acquiring and clearing sites for these interventions. In Toronto three such projects went ahead over these years: Regent Park North, Regent Park South, and Moss Park.

The passage from the first to the second phase took place when the provincial government, which was footing 25 per cent of the renewal bill, queried the appropriateness of the prevailing renewal formula. In accordance with the order of priority given to different zones by a 1956 planning document,<sup>7</sup> Alexandra Park was the next area in Toronto slated for renewal. An advisory committee made up of representatives from every level of government involved in urban renewal was set up to study this matter. The committee came out in 1962 in favour of a more finely-tuned approach to urban renewal, which entailed the reliance on conservation and rehabilitation along with demolition and reconstruction. This flexible formula was adopted to deal with Alexandra Park, although the rehabilitation component was neglected because of the absence of federal subsidies for expenditures of this nature. This somewhat subdued form of renewal still caused the displacement of 2,695 residents of the area between 1964 and 1971.<sup>8</sup> A planning report tabled in 1965 advocated the extension of this formula throughout Toronto's urban renewal program. In effect this meant that site clearance would be confined to areas where housing was deemed beyond repair irrespective of whether they encompassed a few houses or

several blocks. The report identified three such areas, including Trefann Court where 187 houses were to be demolished to make way for 895 public housing units and an industrial zone.<sup>9</sup>

The designation of Trefann Court as a renewal area triggered an unprecedented movement of opposition which spread to every neighbourhood anticipating urban renewal.<sup>10</sup> The intensity of this opposition brought urban renewal as practised within phases one and two to an ignominious end and a opened a third phase. This phase, which extended from 1966 until the early 1970s, was marked by the growing unpopularity of earlier formulas and by the gradual emergence of a new form of neighbourhood planning based on interactions between planners, community workers, local politicians and residents. In Trefann Court, East of Parliament, Don Vale, and Kensington, working committees made up of these four groups were set up to formulate planning recommendations for their respective neighbourhoods. Invariably these committees took a strong stand in favour of the conservation of the built environment of their areas.<sup>11</sup>

#### *The Political Life*

As the rumbling of discontent over urban renewal was growing louder, significant changes were occurring on the Toronto political scene. These changes, the origin of which can partly be traced back to the upheaval against renewal, were to have a profound influence on the form taken by neighbourhood planning in the 1970s.

Before 1969 the political system of the city of Toronto was by and large in congruence with the principles of the type of municipal reform that had taken shape in the United States at the turn of the century. Its proponents were actively supporting a reshaping of municipal political systems that would put an end to the squandering of municipal funds. The dedication of municipal administrations to a

cultivation of votes and their frequent corruption were held accountable for this financial irresponsibility. Reformers were calling for a political system that would promote a greater efficiency in the allocation of public funds by maximizing the political distance between ward politics and the decision makers. Sheltered from the necessity of constant responses to local demands, decision makers could then follow long-term programs under the expert advice of members of the civic service. In short, these traditional reformers were promoting a "de-politicization" of municipal administrations. The delineation of large wards and the at-large election of certain representatives were ways of distancing localized interests from decision makers.<sup>12</sup> In Toronto the Board of Control assumed such a role. This body, enjoying strong executive functions and a strategic control over city finances, was composed of four representatives and the mayor, all of whom were elected through an at large suffrage.<sup>13</sup> Another distancing factor was the presence of large wards encompassing a variety of social and ethnic groups in the central area.

A key feature of the city of Toronto's political life before 1969 was the absence of political parties. This made for a fluidity of coalitions according to issues at City Council.<sup>14</sup> Beneath these vacillations at the surface of Toronto's political life, however, a deep-rooted consensus prevailed among council members about the desirability of major private development projects in the city. The unanimous adoption of plans and zoning by-laws that were extremely permissive towards high-density developments attests to such a consensus. Also, whenever the need arose, the council resorted to zoning amendments to accommodate developers.<sup>15</sup>

In the late 1960s three factors concurred to change the political configuration of City Hall by favouring the election of a new breed of politicians. First, a growing dissatisfaction with urban renewal (involving the public sector) and urban redevelopment (involving

private enterprise) became a particularly fertile breeding-ground for a political opposition in Toronto. Secondly, modifications to the political system were conducive to an enhancement of the political leverage of neighbourhood-based interest groups. In 1969 the Board of Control was dissolved and two new wards were created to maintain the number of elected representatives. Thereafter, every elected member, except the mayor, would represent a ward. Also, the possibility of stronger ties between representatives and particular neighbourhoods was augmented by a reduction in the size of the wards. Finally, the central area strip wards that combined working-class and middle-class neighbourhoods were replaced by block wards allowing distinct representation on council for these two classes.<sup>16</sup> The third factor of change was the overt entrance at the 1969 election of three political parties on the political scene.

After the 1969 civic election the traditional politicians at City Hall came under constant attack from a group of eight newly elected aldermen, seven of whom displayed the stripes of the municipal political parties. This motley crew of differing political affiliations soon banded together in its opposition to old-guard politicians. In fact the various stands taken by the new guard, as this group of aldermen came to be known, stemmed from a hostility towards the political legacy of the traditional reform movement. The new guard stood for greater public involvement in decision making, in particular at the neighbourhood level. Through "community politics" <sup>17</sup> they were attempting to protect neighbourhoods against City Hall's autocratic decisions that reflected a favourable attitude towards developers and large-scale public projects. In the new guard's view, participatory democracy and the preservation of neighbourhoods went hand in hand. These newly elected aldermen regarded neighbourhood residents as potential agents of conservation. They considered that, given the opportunity to

influence the municipal level, most residents would safeguard their living environment. For some members of the new guard barriers set in the path of redevelopment were also meant to stem the decline of the production sector of the city's economy by protecting working-class neighbourhoods and industries from the encroachment of high-rise apartment and office buildings.<sup>18</sup> To a large extent the principles upheld by the new guard had been cast in the mould of the opposition movement to urban renewal and urban redevelopment in Toronto. For years thereafter they bore the mark of their origin.

Between 1970 and 1972 the new guard's success in realizing its political vision was seriously impaired by its minority status at City Council. The approval of private development projects proceeded as usual. Over these two years no major development application was rejected. This is not to say that the new guard had no effect on policy making but rather that its impact was circumscribed to a few policy areas. The new guard's influence was most intensively felt in the search for a neighbourhood-based alternative to the urban renewal program, which was by then running out of political steam.

In 1972 the election of three additional newguard council members bolstered the group's position at City Hall. David Crombie, the newly elected mayor, and 11 of the 22 council members were now identified with the new guard. They were denied control over council, however, by the mayor's resolution to govern from the centre by assuring a balance between the right and the left wing.<sup>19</sup> These new political circumstances nevertheless allowed for an appreciable extension of their influence on decision making. Their achievements in the field of housing were particularly significant. They were instrumental in setting up the City of Toronto Housing Department in 1973 and Cityhome, a non-profit housing corporation, the following year. But they were unable to control policy areas when confronted by firm

resistance on the part of the old guard. This is evidenced by the new guard's inability to prevent a long list of exceptions to the 1973 by-law limiting the height of new buildings in the downtown area to 45 feet.

### *The Neighbourhood Improvement Plan in Toronto*

Among the different policy areas, neighbourhood improvements mirrored most faithfully the new guard's political vision. In the spring of 1973 the Toronto Neighbourhood Improvement Program (TNIP) was launched in three sectors of the city. This program, which was entirely financed by the city of Toronto, had been approved by council in 1971. It had been formulated with an eye on the experience of working committees set up in zones where urban renewal efforts had been halted. Sectors were selected on the basis of both the need for improvements and their residents' interest in the program. The TNIP engaged in laneway improvements, the creation and upgrading of parks and community facilities, and house repairs conducted by local crews of workers. The participation of local residents took place at every stage of the decision-making process, and in certain cases they even contributed to the implementation of the program by their manual work.<sup>20</sup>

Immediately after the signature of the federal/provincial agreement on the CMHC NIP in 1974, the city of Toronto submitted a list of 11 eligible neighbourhoods, including the three TNIP areas. From the city's point of view the NIP as devised by the CMHC was an instrument compatible with its own NIP. The federal NIP was perceived by City Hall as a means of accelerating its neighbourhood improvements by quadrupling the \$1 million yearly contribution it was making.<sup>21</sup>

A clear participatory stamp was put on the federal NIP in Toronto. Indeed maximum use was made of the provisions for citizen

involvement written in the federal regulations. In three areas the programs were community-initiated. In the other cases the designation of neighbourhoods by the city's Development Department was submitted to representative bodies of residents for approval. In one instance, the South of Carlton neighbourhood residents turned down the municipal designation. Federal and provincial regulations required municipalities to submit a budgetary breakdown and a redevelopment plan for each NIP they wished to have approved.<sup>22</sup> In Toronto, however, both budgetary breakdowns and redevelopment plans were presented in broad terms to secure room for the input of residents in the planning process. Even these broad targets were revised when they proved to be at odds with the residents' priorities. For example, residents were responsible for withdrawing land acquisition for new housing from the initial city proposal for the Niagara NIP project.<sup>23</sup>

It is not surprising, given the emphasis placed on local participation in decision making, that the lion's share (77.3 per cent) of NIP expenditures in Toronto went on social and recreational facilities.<sup>24</sup> It stands to reason that residents of a neighbourhood would wish to see money allocated to an improvement of facilities for their own use and that, given a choice, few of them would favour the channelling of funds towards the purchase of land for housing. Such an apportionment would mean that, to a large extent, newcomers would be the beneficiaries of these expenditures. Control over the program by residents was thus incompatible with the construction of public housing - either by the Ontario Housing Corporation or by Cityhome - in NIP areas. NIP's housing component was further weakened in Toronto by the absence of enforcement of the housing code in designated areas. City Hall was worried that residents would perceive such an enforcement as an unsolicited intervention running counter to its approach to neighbourhood improvement.<sup>25</sup> This lack of

coercion can be held responsible, along with an unwieldy application procedure, for the low RRAP take-up rate in Toronto NIP areas.<sup>26</sup>

### *The NIP in Montreal: An Uneasy Accommodation*

#### *Urban Renewal in Montreal*

Prior to 1965 Montreal was the scene of a few disjointed urban renewal projects. In 1956 the Habitations Jeanne-Mance scheme was launched. This was to be a pure application of the site clearance and public housing construction formula. Over the following nine years two other major projects involving the acquisition and clearing of sites went ahead. Their purpose, however, was not residential. During the first half of the 1960s interest groups and, more particularly, charity organizations, were vocal in denouncing an absence of commitment on the part of governments to the replacement of slums in Montreal with public housing. In December 1964 priests from 14 parishes located in the south-west sector of the city (Saint-Henri, Petite Bourgogne, and Pointe Saint-Charles districts) published a letter lamenting the inhuman living conditions in the slums of the area. This letter and the subsequent attention the media gave to the problem prompted the municipal and provincial governments into action.<sup>27</sup> It had become clear to elected representatives that public opinion had been mobilized by the issue, and that, therefore, there were electoral rewards to be reaped from an urban renewal program that would lead to the rehousing of slum dwellers. In 1965 the city administration embarked on its first renewal project having a strong housing component since Habitations Jeanne-Mance. The project, which took place in the Petite Bourgogne area, involved the rehabilitation of existing structures as well as the replacement of non-conforming land uses and of buildings beyond repair by public housing. Another feature of the project was its gradual progression, which allowed

rehousing within the neighbourhood. Shortly thereafter in 1967, this renewal concept was adopted by the Quebec Housing Corporation.<sup>28</sup> Its Detailed Renewal Program (DRP), modelled on the Petite Bourgogne scheme, placed the accent on the replacement and restoration of structures with the purpose of strengthening the housing function in declining areas. The aspects of the DRP that were consistent with the CMHC urban renewal program were eligible for federal financial support. By 1974 in Montreal 12 DRPs were either implemented or in the process of being implemented. From 1965 to 1975 the trend in the planning of DRPs in Montreal was towards a greater conservation of the built environment and decreasing concentrations of public housing units.<sup>29</sup> Still, the construction of public housing remained the dominant component of the DRP in Montreal.

The City assured a rehabilitation of the Petite Bourgogne housing stock directly by purchasing and improving existing structures and indirectly by its subsidy program launched in 1965. A strict enforcement of the housing code assured an extensive use of municipal leverage money by landlords to improve their buildings. Originally confined to the Petite Bourgogne sector, this rehabilitation subsidy program was extended to the city's entire territory in 1969. The enforcement of the housing code was restricted, however, to certain DRP areas and to sectors where housing was in great need of repair. Between 1965 and 1974 some 15,000 housing units were brought to conformity with the housing code, with or without the assistance of municipal subsidies.<sup>30</sup> Until 1972, when the federal government engaged in a pilot program making low-interest mortgage loans available in Montreal for rehabilitation purposes, and 1973, when the provincial government agreed to cover 50 per cent of the subsidies for rehabilitation, the city of Montreal had been this program's sole purveyor of funds.

Because of the late beginning of urban renewal in the province of Quebec, the federal freeze on the financing of urban renewal in November 1969 was not felt with the same acuity in its cities (including Montreal) as it was elsewhere in the country. Since most projects in Quebec had been initiated in the latter half of the 1960s, by November 1969 many were at stages advanced enough to be granted federal support until their completion. In 1975 the federal government was still financing 42 "old-type" urban renewal projects in the province of Quebec.<sup>31</sup>

### *The Political Life*

Over the years when Montreal was devising and implementing a coordinated renewal program, the city's political system was characterized by an imperviousness to local influences and a concentration of power. First, the mode of representation (3 councillors were elected in each of the 15 large wards, which averaged 80,000 residents) made it difficult to maintain close ties between neighbourhood-based interest groups and council members. Secondly at the summit of the city's political and administrative edifice stood the mayor, who was entrusted with extensive legislative power, and an overarching executive committee responsible for the administration of the city.<sup>32</sup> This political system was very much in congruence with the system advocated by reformers at the turn of the century, which shielded municipal administrations from local interest.

The systemic effects of this political set-up, which lasted from 1962 to 1978, were compounded by the style of the administration in place over these years. Mayor Jean Drapeau and his Civic Party firmly adhered to the notion of a "disciplined" or "minimal" democracy,<sup>33</sup> which restricts public participation in municipal political life to the ballot box. Organized bodies of citizens were deemed unrepresentative by this administration because of their lack of a

formal mandate and were thus denied the role of political interlocutors. This attitude deprived the citizens of a major channel of influence on the city administration. Furthermore, until its last term in office, the Civic Party did not allow councillors to become active representatives of neighbourhood interests at City Hall. The caucus politics of the administration left council members almost without a role to play apart from that of rubber-stamping decisions emanating from the Executive Committee and processing minor grievances from the constituency.<sup>34</sup>

Under Civic Party rule, local government interventions in Montreal were divided into three distinct policy areas:

1. With respect to the redevelopment of the city's core, the administration adopted a laissez-faire attitude untrammelled by zoning regulations. From its point of view, a high density development of the central business district provided a convenient source of municipal revenues contributing to the financing of the two other policy areas.<sup>35</sup>
2. The second policy area, which remained the personal fiefdom of Mayor Drapeau, encompassed the large-scale public projects engaged in by the city.
3. The third related to the delivery of municipal services and the upkeep or replacement of the city's built environment in sectors that did not hold a potential for important private redevelopment projects. Urban renewal was an important component of this policy area, which was dominated by the Executive Committee and, more specifically, by its chairmen.

All three of these policy areas bore the strong imprint of the administration's aversion to public participation in the municipal political life. Although in the first case the administration's role was limited to that of a facilitator of private development, in the second and third cases it enjoyed, unswayed

by public pressure, an impressive margin of initiative in the generation and implementation of policies and programs. The power structure at City Hall meant that utter discretion in the steering of the city rested in the hands of top political figures. In Montreal, rather than consulting with the public, these figures relied extensively on expert advice in their decision making. This approach explains the central influence of high-level members of the civic service - in particular, Guy Legault - in the formulation of the urban renewal formula devised for the Petite Bourgogne sector.

### *The Neighbourhood Improvement Plan in Montreal*

When the federal urban renewal policy reached its inflection point in 1969-1970, Montreal's urban renewal program was still operative. In fact there were projects at every stage of implementation. The history of urban renewal in Montreal and the firm adherence of the city administration to a centralized view of municipal politics were not conducive to a compliance with the philosophical shift in terms of urban renewal reflected by the NIP. In the first place the urban renewal program launched in 1965 by the Montreal administration had not been discredited in political terms. The major grievances against the Drapeau administration concerned its permissiveness in the redevelopment of the core area (such as the Concordia development project) and its handling of both the planning and the construction of facilities for the 1976 Olympics. Urban renewal, by contrast, caused little furore. Residents were generally favourable to the urban renewal formula adopted in the Petite Bourgogne area but the methods of implementation raised complaints. They objected to the absence of public participation in the planning of renewal programs, the terms of relocation, the exclusion of residents from the administration of public housing projects, and public housing rent scales.<sup>36</sup> The renewal formula was by and large left unscathed. In the second place the participatory bent of the

NIP, mirrored in particular by the provisions made for public involvement in the planning of local programs, ran against the grain of the Montreal administration.

The federal policy revision failed to occasion a change of direction in Montreal. The city's strategy was to endeavour to maintain its renewal policies while conforming to CMHC criteria governing the allocation of subsidies. In accordance with the Quebec Housing Corporation advice on this matter,<sup>37</sup> the city of Montreal designated as NIP areas sectors that had been the object of DRP planning and concocted NIP plans by putting together anticipated DRP expenditures that qualified for financial support under the new program. The administration clearly treated the NIP as an expedient to meet renewal objectives that predated the program.

It was to be expected then that the DRP emphasis on housing objectives would filter through the NIP in Montreal. In two of the three NIP areas (Montreal's NIP areas are Saint-Henri Nord, Terrasse Ontario and de Champlain) significant efforts were made to consolidate the housing function through rehabilitation and public housing construction (see Morin article this issue). In the Terrasse Ontario sector, where two NIP projects were successively implemented, 916 new public rental units were built between 1970 and 1980, in most cases, however, without any financial contribution from the NIP.<sup>38</sup> In this sector NIP funds went, for the most part, towards the purchase of land for social and public housing and for social and recreational facilities. In Saint-Henri Nord, another NIP area, the Municipal Housing Corporation either built or restored 317 housing units, often with the assistance of NIP subsidies for the acquisition and clearing of land and of RRAP financing for housing rehabilitation.<sup>39</sup> The NIP also inherited from the DRP the view that industries located in residential areas should make way for housing. This attitude was consonant with the Planning Department's position that inner-city industries scattered in non-

industrial areas were largely doomed by lack of room for expansion and by difficulties with transportation. NIP plans called for an elimination of warehousing and industrial premises in the three designated areas. In one extreme case an NIP submission from the city of Montreal (the Parc du Carmel) was turned down by the provincial government because the industrial expropriations it proposed would cause an unacceptable number of jobs to be lost.

The city's response to the CMHC requirement for participation by citizens was limited to its providing information on the improvements involved in its plans. The practice adopted in DRP sectors, which diffused information through a site office, was extended to NIP areas. It is understandable that little room was made for a more substantial form of participation given the autocratic proclivities of the administration and a reliance from the outset of NIP projects on detailed proposals inherited from earlier plans.

In practice, then, NIPs were indistinguishable from DRPs in that they were vintage urban renewal in the post-1965 Montreal tradition. The city administration had been successful in maintaining its course through the federal policy revision, by making use of the NIP in a manner that was consistent with prior renewal objectives. In one case where this proved impossible, the CMHC bowed to Montreal pressures for revised guidelines. This is how, through the special district provision written in the law, most of the Montreal territory qualified for RRAP loans while, initially, this program was to be for the most part restricted to NIP areas.<sup>40</sup> This expansion of RRAP brought the federal and the municipal housing improvement programs into greater conformity.



***Neighbourhood Improvement Plan  
Toronto-Style and Montreal-Style***

The evolution of the urban renewal effort and of municipal politics in Toronto and Montreal over the years leading to the implementation of the NIP will now be compared. Attention also will be given to differences in the form taken by this program in the two cities.

The use made of the NIP in Toronto was influenced by the city administration's commitment to safeguard working-class, inner-city neighbourhoods. This objective was very much in keeping with a strong stand in favour of public participation in neighbourhood planning, which was mirrored by the central role given to residents in NIP decision making. Neighbourhood improvements that reflect residents' preferences are indeed likely to solidify their attachment to their neighbourhood. The NIP was then to contribute both to a preservation of the built environment of inner-city areas and to a stabilization of their social make-up - at least until gentrification took hold of architecturally attractive and well-located neighbourhoods. By contrast, the city of Montreal was trying in its use of the NIP to deviate as little as possible from earlier planning objectives that involved a significant amount of rebuilding within designated areas. In line with the practice regarding urban renewal in Montreal, its Housing and Planning Department mapped out the NIP plans to the finest detail in a process that made little provision for public participation.

The differences in the approaches to the NIP by the two cities can be traced back to a chain of interconnected factors: the evolution of urban renewal; the intensity of public reactions to renewal; the form of tenure within designated areas; the nature of the municipal political system; and the priorities of the two administrations. In Toronto the urban renewal program was brought to a standstill by the opposition movements that coalesced in designated areas. It is noteworthy that homeowners occupied a

prominent position within these movements, occasionally confronting tenants who did not share their strong anti-renewal views. In Trefann Court, for example, where 41 per cent of households owned their home in the mid - 1960s, the Trefann Court Residents Association, composed largely of homeowners, fought the renewal scheme. Meanwhile, the Trefann Neighbours and Tenants Association, mostly made up of tenants, took a favourable position towards the scheme.<sup>41</sup> Such a divergence of views is easy to comprehend since tenants had more to gain and less to lose from traditional urban renewal than homeowners. Unlike tenants, who could anticipate privileged access to public housing, homeowners were left to their own devices once the compensation for their expropriated property was paid. This compensation was often insufficient to purchase an equivalent home on the Toronto housing market. Likewise, the active participation of homeowners in the promotion of neighbourhood improvements as an alternative to traditional forms of renewal is readily understandable. They were the group of residents best positioned to benefit from these improvements. Unlike tenants, homeowners could take advantage of these improvements in two ways: they could remain in the area and enjoy the improvements or cash in on the greater attractiveness of the neighbourhood by selling their property at a higher value.

In 1969 modifications to the city of Toronto political system eased the entry of members to City Council who espoused the views held by organizations opposing urban renewal and redevelopment. These newly elected members, active in the search for alternatives to urban renewal as practiced hitherto in Toronto, were instrumental in devising the NIP and in setting the orientation given to the federal NIP in Toronto. From the mid -1960s to the early 1970s, then, urban renewal in Toronto took a 180 degree turn. This volte-face was accomplished by neighbourhood-based opposition movements, which raised the political cost of

traditional renewal projects to an unacceptable level, and by the new guard at City Council, which, along with the Planning Department, contrived an alternative form of renewal.

In Montreal urban renewal, when it consisted of public housing projects, did not raise a comparable storm of protest. This situation can be accounted for by three factors: the mode of tenure in affected areas, the mobility pattern of their residents, and the form taken by urban renewal in Montreal. Renewal projects with a strong public housing component took place in areas showing very high tenancy rates. In the Petite Bourgogne sector, for example, at the inception of the renewal program, 94 per cent of the households were tenants. Also in these areas, not unlike in Montreal working-class areas in general, moves were frequent but occurred most often within the neighbourhood. In Saint-Henri Nord, for example, between 1970 and 1975 at least one move had occurred in 55 per cent of the housing units. In the meantime only 15 percent of the sector's households had migrated out of the Saint-Henri neighbourhood.<sup>42</sup> The urban renewal procedure adopted in Montreal followed the gradual sector-by-sector renewal of a designated area, accompanied by the rehousing of those displaced within their neighbourhood. This approach was consistent with usual mobility patterns and, thus, unlikely to be the cause of intense protest on the part of residents. It is significant that protest touched off by urban renewal in Montreal was aimed more at the partial application of the procedure than at the procedure itself. Citizens organizations held this partial application responsible for relocation difficulties and a forced exodus of residents from their neighbourhoods. The absence of challenge to the Montreal renewal formula explains why, when Toronto was in the throes of a conflict-ridden reformulation of its approach to urban renewal, there was little cause for the Montreal administration to take a similar path.

The generally favourable public attitude towards urban renewal in Montreal was responsible for the dissonance in the early 1970s between a desire on the part of the city administration to maintain the current program and federal policy revisions responding to the protest originating from other Canadian cities.

From the launching of urban renewal in Canada in the years following World War II, federal policies and city of Toronto programs unfolded with a great deal of symmetry. The factor behind this coincidence of evolution was a process of mutual adjustment between the city of Toronto and CMHC. This process resulted from the administration's resolution to take full advantage of federal renewal money (until it was confronted with an opposition movement) and from CMHC's perception of Toronto as a testing ground for its policies. This relationship explains the city's eagerness to cast programs in the form that warranted the highest level of federal financing. It also clarifies CMHC's close watch on Toronto's renewal endeavours and its readiness to make policy adjustments according to the experience gained in this context. An infusion of personnel with direct experience of renewal in Toronto at the upper reaches of CMHC also played a role in harmonizing the Toronto and the federal approach to urban renewal over the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

The parallelism between urban renewal policy making at these two levels of government was particularly clear from the mid - 1960s to the launching of the federal NIP in 1974. Over these years Toronto and the federal government followed the same sequence of adjustments to the political backlash caused by urban renewal. But, unlike previous policy changes, the movement of retreat from current programs and the devising of a new urban renewal formula were initiated by the city. When CMHC froze its contribution towards urban renewal in 1969, projects in Toronto were already at a standstill. Then, in 1974, the

federal NIP dovetailed with the Toronto NIP started the previous year. Similarities between the two NIPs were striking, since behind the formulation of both programs was a strong desire to accommodate grievances voiced by groups opposed to urban renewal, which had been active in Toronto and in other Canadian cities.

In Montreal, on the contrary, municipal and federal urban renewal policies demonstrated a distinct absence of parallelism. In the mid - 1960s, when Montreal developed the approach to urban renewal that was to guide its program, concerns about federal financing took second place to a determination to come up with a formula suited to Montreal's urban decay problems. It was generally expected within the Montreal administration that the federal government would adapt its financial guidelines to the form of urban renewal about to be set in motion in their city.<sup>43</sup> In the case of housing rehabilitation, a key component of the Montreal renewal formula, it took seven years (from 1965 until 1972) for these expectations to be met. The lack of synchronization between the two levels of government was further evident from the late 1960s until the mid - 1970s. The federal policy revisions reflecting the harsh criticism voiced in some Canadian cities were, indeed, incongruous with the Montreal renewal program that was then in full swing, and, by and large, unscathed by opposition movements. For the city administration, policy reorientations on the part of the federal government were tantamount to an arbitrary change of rules in midstream.

Differences between the two cities in their approach to the NIP, which were conditioned by their respective political reality and urban renewal history, were reflected in the use made of the program's funds (see Table 1). Toronto manifested a firm intention to adhere strictly to the CMHC criteria for a 50 per cent federal underwriting and to a planning process conducive to public participation. It was not surprising, then, that most NIP

expenditures (77.3 per cent) went towards the construction and improvement of recreational and social facilities. This was at once a preference to be expected on the part of residents and a sector of expenditure that qualified for maximum CMHC support. Meanwhile, a commitment of the city administration to the maintenance of industrial installations within inner-city neighbourhoods and the weak housing component of NIPs in Toronto explain the extremely low contribution (0.9 per cent) towards land acquisition and clearing.

NIP expenditure breakdowns in Montreal took a different form because of the administration's enduring adherence to planning principles dating back from the mid - 1960s. A desire to brace up the housing function at the expense of industrial and other non-conforming land uses explains why 31 per cent of total NIP funds went to land acquisition and clearing. Moreover, the legacy of a more traditional approach to renewal accounts for a high concentration of funds in a few neighbourhoods. Also, the share of NIP spending shouldered by the federal government was smaller in Montreal than in Toronto (39.5 per cent compared to 45.2) because of the nature of NIP plans in Montreal, which were little more than collections of proposals borrowed from other projects for their compatibility with NIP subsidy guidelines. Some of the proposals listed in these plans only qualified for the 25 per cent federal underwriting. This was the case of expenditures for municipal services and facilities (mostly road-works) which absorbed 84.7 per cent of the NIP funds in the de Champlain area. It must also be kept in mind that in Montreal, unlike in Toronto, NIPs were but one component of renewal efforts undertaken by the city administration in given areas. The intensity of public housing construction financed by other sources of public funds in Terrasse Ontario, an area chosen for two NIP projects, vividly illustrates this situation.

## **Conclusion**

This article has identified the determinants underlying the attitudes of the administrations of Montreal and Toronto towards the NIP by zeroing in on key variables in both cities. These included the history of urban renewal and of the protest it generated, the form of tenure's influence on attitudes towards renewal, features of the municipal political systems, and the city administration *modus operandi*. The observation of these variables has unravelled the circumstances behind Toronto's adherence to the principles embodied in the NIP and Montreal's resistance to the federal change of direction in its renewal policy.

A shared resolution to be responsive to conflicts triggered by renewal projects was behind a convergence between the Toronto and the federal approach to urban renewal. In the early 1970s both the federal government and the Toronto administration engaged in attempts to contrive a less contentious form of urban renewal. In 1974, when the CMHC launched a program that was to favour a preservation of the built environment of inner-city neighbourhoods and public participation in planning, Toronto was already carrying out a policy based on the same ideas. Combative groups opposed to traditional forms of urban renewal and the arrival at City Council of members sharing their view had been responsible for Toronto's policy revision. In both its own NIP and in the implementation of the federal NIP, the city administration was attempting to devise a form of neighbourhood intervention that would accommodate grievances expressed by opponents to urban renewal. In the meantime in Montreal the general acceptance by the population of the ongoing renewal program and the autocratic nature of the city administration led to the retention of a renewal formula characterized by a firm top-heavy planning process. The city administration undertook to adapt spending requirements, which stemmed from renewal objectives set some ten years earlier, to the

revised guidelines governing federal financing.

Differences in the approaches taken by the two municipal administrations do not explain entirely the contrasting receptions residents gave urban renewal in Toronto and Montreal. Form of tenure is also an important factor. In Toronto owner-occupiers spearheaded the opposition to urban renewal. They had much to lose and little to gain from these projects and their number in designated areas assured political leverage. By contrast, Montreal's neighbourhoods undergoing urban renewal were almost exclusively inhabited by tenants. For a large proportion of them urban renewal meant access to public, that is improved and affordable, housing. Although the implementation of programs became the object of criticism, the nature of the programs remained largely unchallenged. Improvements in tenants' housing conditions and the near absence of owner-occupiers within Montreal's renewal areas are major explanations for the absence of large-scale opposition to publicly sponsored renewal in that city. The absence of owner-occupiers within designated areas accounted for the acceptance by residents of urban renewal projects consisting in the construction of public housing. This condition was met in Montreal, a city of tenants, but not in Toronto, a city of owner-occupiers.

By stressing the contrast in the approaches to the NIP taken by the city administrations, this paper has considered two opposite forms of policy making at the municipal level. These are the centralized form, which involves a denial of public involvement in decision making, and the participatory form, which is predicated on the notion that groups of citizens should be party to the definition of policies affecting them. This paper has also shed light on how the nature of government interventions within a particular policy area is affected by these two modes of policy making. In Toronto, sensitivity to citizens' sentiments and the opening of urban renewal to public participation caused a complete

reversal of the strategy hitherto deployed. The demolition and reconstruction formula gave way to a form of intervention that placed the accent on the preservation of the built environment as well as on the construction and improvement of social and recreational activities. By comparison, Montreal's urban renewal strategy showed much greater consistency. Unfettered by formal channels of public participation, planners were able to map out detailed NIP plans that closely adhered to politically defined renewal objectives dating from 1965. This approach accounts for the extensive change of the built environment brought about through, or along with, NIPs in Montreal as well as their public housing bent. In the cases under study, public participation has been associated with a profound change of policy, a respect for the built environment of inner-city neighbourhoods, and the addition of facilities requested by their residents. Conversely, the autocratic mode of policy making has been connected with a steady line of policy and a form of urban renewal relying extensively on the construction of public housing. In a sense this latter form of policy making is associated with the pursuit of a city-wide social objective — the construction of public housing for low income tenants — while public participation (for the most part), led to the construction of recreational facilities meant for current residents.

**Table I: Neighbourhood Improvement Program Expenditures in Montreal and Toronto**

Allocation of Funds								Origin of Funds		
	Planning	Residents Participation	Social and Recreational Facilities	Land for Social and Public Housing	Relocation	Administration	Municipal Services & Facilities	Total	Federal (CMHC)	Municipal and Provincial
City of Toronto										
Queen-Landsdowne		4,466	1,366,588			196,472	228,058	1,795,584	840,777	954,807
South East Spadina		5,555	1,238,985			94,019	101,800	1,440,359	694,729	745,630
Wallace-Emerson		2,921	1,871,611			386,581	143,164	2,404,277	977,526	1,426,751
Dufferin-Davenport		374	516,870			128,488	62,948	708,680	338,603	370,077
South Riverdale		8,864	1,977,242			232,654	89,775	2,308,535	1,131,824	1,176,711
South East Riverdale	44,876	1,130	1,176,337			103,676		1,326,019	477,800	824,219
Niagara		1,116	502,066			150,647	75,388	729,217	345,762	383,455
Junction		925	187,415			114,067	96,973	399,380	175,447	223,933
East of Main	26,696	644	628,000			94,700	13,118	763,228	378,317	384,911
Kensington		1,865	501,124			114,472	293,063	910,524	381,997	528,527
Dovercourt Park		946	1,117,182	132,950		161,466	138,050	1,550,594	730,422	820,172
City of Toronto	71,572	28,806	11,083,420	132,950		1,777,242	1,242,407	14,336,397	6,473,204	7,863,193
Total Percentage	(0.5)	(0.2)	(77.3)	(0.9)		(12.4)	(8.7)	(100.0)	(45.2)	(54.8)
City of Montreal										
Saint-Henri Nord	68,708		582,495	1,523,920	23,860	152,095	365,853	2,716,931	1,200,000	1,516,931
Terrasse Ontario (Phase I)	87,206		1,380,455	1,717,853	8,010	31,707		3,225,231	1,612,616	1,612,615
Terrasse Ontario (Phase II)	119,715		822,879	810,227		20,161	33,887	1,806,869	894,963	911,906
de Champlain	64,638		308,534	227,824		327,865	5,146,242	6,075,103	1,750,991	4,324,112
City of Montreal	340,267		3,094,363	4,279,824	31,870	531,828	5,545,982	13,824,134	5,458,570	8,365,564
Total Percentage	(2.5)		(22.4)	(31.0)	(0.2)	(3.8)	(40.1)	(100.0)	(39.5)	(60.5)

**Source:** Final NIP claims to the CMHC filed by the Toronto and Montreal administrations.

**Note:** The lower overall sums expended through the NIP in Montreal reflect provincial priorities. The Province of Quebec used its statutory powers to direct a larger proportion of federal funds than in other provinces towards the two companion programs to the NIP (RRAP and Site Clearance Program). It remains that the Montreal administration was, like the Toronto administration, responsible for both the selection of NIP areas and the allocation of funds to the different federally approved sectors of expenditure.

## Notes

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- 4 Canada, National Housing Act, 21-22 Elizabeth 11, Chapter 18, Section 27.2.
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- 10 For a detailed chronicle of this opposition movement and of how it brought about a *volte-face* of the city see G. Fraser, *Fighting Back: Urban Renewal in Trefann Court* (Toronto: Hakkert, 1972).
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- 17 See W. Magnusson, "Introduction: the Development of Canadian Urban Government," in *City Politics in Canada*, ed W. Magnusson and A. Sancton, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 34. Also on the neoreformist (or progressive) movement in local politics in Canada see D. Higgins, "Progressive City Politics and the Citizen Movement: A Status Report," 84-95, and C. Andrew, "Ottawa: Progressives in Power," 96-108 in *After the Developers*, ed. J. Lorimer and C. MacGregor (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1981)
- 18 The City of Toronto cumulates many of the circumstances that favour the spread of tertiary activities and the replacement of working-class by middle-class residents: a generally prosperous economy, a high concentration of office space in the central business district, a wealth of retail outlets and cultural activities in the core, etc. See on the tertiarisation process affecting some American cities, N. I. Fainstein and S.S. Fainstein, "Restructuring the American City: a Comparative Perspective," in *Urban Policy under Capitalism*, ed. N. I. Fainstein, and S. S. Fainstein, (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1982), 161-89.
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- 22 Province of Ontario, Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation and the Province of Ontario, *Neighbourhood Improvement Program Administration Guide* (Toronto: Government of Ontario, 1975), 3.
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- 24 Canada, CMHC, *Impact of the NIP in Toronto*, 17.
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- 26 Canada, CMHC, *Impact of the NIP in Toronto*, 29-30 and 191.

- 27 P. Hamel, "Logement et luttes urbaines à Montréal 1963-1976" (unpublished paper, Faculté de l'aménagement, Université de Montréal, 1983), 207; R. Mayer, "L'idéologie du réaménagement urbaine à Québec (quartier St. Roch) et à Montréal (quartier Petite-Bourgogne)" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis in sociology, Université Laval, Québec, 1976), 1, 4, and 433-4; S. Y. Pottle, "La rénovation urbaine et le phénomène de pression: étude monographique, le cas de la Petite Bourgogne," (unpublished M.A. thesis in sociology, Université de Montréal, 1970), 118-9.
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- 29 See G. Divay and J. Godbout, *Une politique de logement au Québec* (Montréal: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1973) 221.
- 30 Ville de Montréal, Service de l'habitation et de l'urbanisme, *Rapport d'activités* (Montreal: Ville de Montréal, 1974).
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- 40 See, on the Montreal requests for a revision of guidelines, *Le Devoir*, 5 Feb. 1975, 2; 6 Feb. 1975, 3.
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- 42 Ville de Montreal *Saint-Henri Nord*, 29
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